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# Bolivian Says Guevara Died Pleading for Life, Ransom

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**LA PAZ, Bolivia**—Ernesto (Che) Guevara died pleading for his life and claiming Fidel Castro would pay \$20 million to ransom him, Bolivian President Barrientos says.

In an interview at his home Barrientos said Guevara was held for 24 hours before being captured by Bolivian Troops who surrounded him.

Barrientos, who has survived eight attempts on his life, said Guevara tried to bargain for his life, claiming he was worth more alive than dead.

The Bolivian president continued:

The soldiers who captured Che did not send a message to the capital asking what to do with him and receive from us an order to shoot him. That was not necessary.

The field units already had orders not to take prisoners. Too



RENE BARRIENTOS

many times, they tried to accept the surrender of guerrillas, and instead were fired on.

"Personally, I would rather have seen him a prisoner of

break the myth of Guevara forever. And since I am the president and obliged to raise money to help Bolivia, I would have entertained a request for his release to Fidel Castro or anyone else who wanted him for a price of \$20 million."

The soldiers of the U.S.-trained Ranger Battalions and regular Bolivian units who fought the guerrillas in the eight-month campaign in southern Bolivia reacted to their enemy just as front line troops do all over the world, Barrientos said. "They had seen 57 of their comrades killed and 37 wounded. They were not disposed to be lenient," he said.

"The Bolivian army now believes only five guerrillas remain at large, four Cubans and one Bolivian, Inti Paredo," Barrientos said. "The region in which they are hiding is closest to Paraguay, but they will get

no help from the Indians and have very little chance of escaping from Bolivia.

"We believe they might try to make their way into Santa Cruz, which is a fairly large town where Spanish is the predominant language.

"There they might lose themselves among the populace. They still have field radios and arms. Inti is their treasurer and we know now that the guerrillas have about \$300,000 for their campaign, both in Bolivian pesos and dollars. We believe Inti still has or has hidden most of this money.

## 80 Reported Killed

Barrientos, who in an interview last March first told of the guerrillas, said the Bolivian army killed 80 of the guerrillas, about 120 more escaped or defected and nine were taken prisoner.

Two of these prisoners, Regis Debray, a French Citizen now on trial and Crio Busto, posed as journalists, he said. The other seven are Bolivians.

The 47-year-old president said he personally would like to see Debray set free since he has been totally discredited in the Communist world by talking so freely about the movements of Che and the guerrilla band.

Most of the Bolivians who joined the guerrillas were dupes, Barrientos said, who didn't know they were accepting anything but a job offer.

These Bolivians got away from the guerrillas whenever they could and provided the government with excellent information about hideouts, strength and

movements of the Guevara band.

The Indians of the region also rejected attempts of the guerrillas to win them over and reported to Bolivian authorities at every opportunity.

## Dairy Up for Sale

Barrientos admitted that his government has Che's diary up for sale to the highest bidder and listed he New York Times, Life magazine, Paris Match and other publications as being among those interested. The army is keeping tight custody of the diary until the auction is resolved.

Barrientos said he personally ordered that Guevara's fingers preserved the guerrilla leader's body was cremated so that a commission of seven Argentine experts could arrive to compare fingerprints.

Barrientos said the Seven Argentines came to Bolivia, made the fingerprint comparison and were satisfied that Guevara was dead. He said he presumes that the fingers have now been cremated and buried with the rest of Che's remains in a place known only to a few members of the army.

Barrientos said his army received only moderate assistance from the U.S. in organizing to defeat the guerrillas.

"They sent us some rifles and some automatic weapons," he said. "And a team of 13 specialists of the Green Berets trained our 2nd Rangers at Santa Cruz."

Both Barrientos and U.S. sources insisted that no U.S. citizens or troops ever went near the combat zone. There is silence about whether Cuban exiles aided the Bolivians.